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THE PSALMISTS' JOURNEY AND THE SANCTUARY: A STUDY IN THE SANCTUARY AND THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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Introduction

The book of Psalms is saturated with sanctuary imagery.¹ However, a brief look at the scattered examples gives the impression that the sanctuary references in the Psalms have no specific intentional arrangement. This may be related to the notion that the Psalter itself is a relatively haphazard collection with little or no discernible organization.²

Scholars, nevertheless, continue to look for signs of intentional internal structuring. A number of settings for the Psalms have been surveyed by various scholars throughout the history of psalmic interpretation, ranging from the historical setting of ancient Israel to its existential and cultic settings.³

¹Examples are the sanctuary (Pss 15:1; 20:2; 63:2; 68:24-25; 73:17; 96:6; 150:1), the house of the Lord (Pss 23:6; 27:4; 36:8-9; 93:5; 122:1; 135:2), the temple (Pss 5:7; 11:4; 18:6; 48:9; 65:4; 68:29; 138:2), God's holy hill (Pss 2:6; 3:4; 15:1; 24:3; 43:3-4), Zion (Pss 2:6; 14:7; 20:2; 48:11-12; 50:2; 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 133:3), the sanctuary items (Pss 26:6; 56:12; 66:15; 84:3; 141:2), festivals and sacrifices (Pss 42:2, 4; 50:14, 23; 54:6; 55:14; 56:12; 76:11; 95:1-2; 96:8; 98:4-6; 100:1-4), the great assembly (Pss 22:25; 26:12; 40:10; 89:7; 102:22; 107:32; 149:1), and other allusions to the sanctuary (Pss 4:6; 13:3; 26:6; 51:7; 61:4; 80:3, 7; 116:13).

²J.F.D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup 217 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 12-13.

³Attempts to find a link between the Psalms and events in David's biography are seen in the headings attached to some of the Psalms (e.g., Ps 34 refers to the events described in 1 Sam 21:10-15; Ps 51 is linked to the events recorded in 2 Sam 12:1-14). With the Enlightenment came an increased emphasis on rational inquiry, and the study of the Psalms focused on seeking to assign each Psalm its proper chronological niche and to dissect each in a quest for its reflection of historical events (e.g., J. Wellhausen, *The Book of Psalms: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text Printed in Colors, with Notes by J. Wellhausen . . . English Translation of the Notes by J. D. Prince* [Facsimile] [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1895]). The nineteenth-century practitioners of the historical-critical method were more interested in the individual psalmist's psychological condition than in the theology of the Psalms (e.g., Johann August Dathe, *Annotations on Some of the Messianic Psalms; from the Commentary of Rosenmüller, with the Latin Version and Notes of Dathe*, trans. Robert Johnston, ed. E.F.C. Rosenmüller [Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1841]). H. Gunkel (*What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* [New York: Macmillan, 1928], 70-71); and S. Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship* [Grand

However, another possibility has begun to impact modern Psalms research—the structure of the Psalter itself,⁴ i.e., the “literary structure, the internal clues that give directions as to how the whole should be read and understood.”⁵

Modern trends in psalmic studies seek to trace how the book of Psalms was structured in order to better understand its overarching purpose and message.⁶ The Psalms, then, are not seen as a random anthology of prayers and praises, but as an intentional collection that has a clear purpose and a unified message.⁷ It is assumed that by looking for interaction between psalms within a context means that the contemporary reader can seek out themes that the editors of the final form of the Psalter wished to emphasize.⁸

Psalms placed in certain positions within the Psalter take on special importance. This applies particularly to the psalms that are placed at the beginning and end of the five Books of the Psalter.⁹ There is wide agreement in modern scholarship that Psalms 1 and 2 function as an introduction to the Psalter and underscore certain key themes that resonate throughout the whole book.¹⁰ These two psalms are

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 5, 23) works gave rise to cultic approaches to the Psalms by arguing for their cultic origins.

⁴H. P. Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition and Post-critical Interpretation of the Psalms* (Sheffield: Continuum International, 1999), 163.

⁵Creach, 11.

⁶E.g., G. H. Wilson, “The Use of the Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85-94; J. L. Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 3-12; W. Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *JSOT* 50 (1991): 63-92; W. Brueggemann and P. D. Miller, “Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker,” *JSOT* 72 (1996): 45-56; J. C. McCann, “Psalms,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: a Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 159-165; M. D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

⁷Futato, 57.

⁸J. A. Grant, “The Psalms and the King,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 107.

⁹Wilson, 85-94.

¹⁰E.g., J. L. Mays, *Psalms: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 15; Futato, 58-59; Grant, 108. Though some argue that only Psalm 1 serves as the introduction to the Psalter and Psalm 2 plays the role of the introduction to the first Book (Wilson, 88), it seems more likely that Psalms 1 and 2 combine to provide a joint introduction to the whole Psalter. Grant, 108, shares two convincing reasons: (1) their common lack of superscription; and (2) various linguistic links between the two psalms, including a bracketing inclusion based on the word אֲשֶׁרִי (“blessed”) (Pss 1:1; 2:12).

intentionally separated from the others in Book I by not being designated "A Psalm of David" (the only exceptions to this are Psalms 10 and 33).

It is suggested in this article that the overarching theme of Psalms 1 and 2 is the sanctuary. If this is so, what is the significance of the sanctuary motif for the shape and message of the Psalms? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the psalms that introduce and close the Psalter with the psalms that serve as canonical markers.

The Sanctuary and the Introduction to the Psalter

The Sanctuary in Psalm 1

Psalm 1 depicts the righteous person as "a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:3). J. L. Mays understands this simile to be a description of "the blessedness of those who trust in the Lord."¹¹ However, Ps 1:3 seems to point to more than this generalized promise of the blessed life. It may also depict the righteous as abiding in the sanctuary. This interpretation is suggested by parallels with several other OT texts, including others in the Psalter, that not only repeat the motifs of the river and the tree found in Psalms 1, but place them within the sanctuary context.

Parallels between Psalm 1:3 and Other Related Old Testament Texts

Psalm 1:3 displays strong connections with a number of OT texts that contain important images related to the sanctuary:

(1). *The imagery of trees.* Psalm 1:3 and Jer 17:7-8 share common wording and imagery: "But *blessed is the man* who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be *like a tree planted by the water* that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; *its leaves are always green*. It has no worries in a year of drought and *never fails to bear fruit* (Jer 17:7-8, emphasis supplied).¹² Here trees are associated with living waters, which, in turn, are linked with God's throne in his holy sanctuary. Thus, "a glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary . . . the spring of living water" (Jer 17:12-13).

The imagery of a tree is prominent among sanctuary images. The tree motif lies in the background of the two pillars that flanked the vestibule of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:21; 2 Kgs 25:16-17; 2 Chron 3:15-17). "[T]he twin pillars of the Solomonic temple, in addition to marking the boundary between the profane and the holy, represented the 'paradisiacal life-giving aspect of the sanctuary.'¹³ Some objects and walls of the temple were decorated with tree

¹¹Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," 4. See also N. M. Sarna, *Songs of the Heart: An Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993), 40.

¹²Unless otherwise specified, Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

¹³Mays, 63.

images (Exod 37:17-22; Ezek 40:16, 22; 41:18-20, 25-26). “Iconographically and architecturally, the temple reflected the garden of God.”¹⁴

J.F.D. Creach rightly contends that “the writer of Ps 1:3 transforms the simile of the tree (as it appears in Jer. 17:8) into a comparison of the righteous to trees planted in the temple precincts” as given in Ezek 47:12.¹⁵ Ezekiel 47:12a states that “*Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail*” (emphasis supplied). Once again, tree imagery in Ezek 47:12a is placed within the sanctuary context in v. 12b: “Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them.” In fact, the entire focus of Ezekiel 40–47 is the sanctuary. The river that gives life to everything it flows through, including the fruit trees that grow on the river’s banks, has its source in the sanctuary (Ezek 47:1-12).

(2) *The Imagery of Streams of Living Waters.* In Ps 1:3, the word פְּלִיטִים (“streams”) is used, perhaps because of its presence in various texts in which the waters of the holy mountain and its temple are described (Pss 36:7-8; 46:4; 65:9; Isa 33:20-21; Ezek 31:3-14).¹⁶ Psalm 36:7-8 relates the sanctuary to the river motif, and thereby points to the abundance in God’s house, which includes drinking from God’s river of delight. Psalm 46:4 depicts the streams that make glad the city of God. In Ps 65:9, the streams of water signify the Lord’s power experienced on Zion. Isaiah 33:20-21 envisions Zion/Jerusalem as a tent (אֹהֶל, which here refers to the sanctuary) that will not be moved and as a place of broad rivers and streams. Ezekiel 31:3-14 may be seen as additional support for the OT writers’ use of trees and streams of water to describe the righteous in the sanctuary, though it does not display textual similarities with Ps 1:3, as Ezek 47:12 does.

(3) *The Imagery of Planting.* The image of the righteous being *planted* in Ps 1:3 is also found in Exod 15:17, where the author describes the exodus experience and the beginnings of Israel as a nation: “You will bring them in and *plant* them on the mountain of your inheritance—the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, *the sanctuary*, O Lord, your hands established” (emphasis supplied). The sanctuary is the place where the righteous are planted.

(4) *The Imagery of Paradise.* The association of waters with paradise and the sanctuary has wide biblical support (Gen 2:10-14; Isa 8:6-7; 30:25; 32:2; Joel 3:18).¹⁷ For example, Gen 2:10-14 describes the river that originated

¹⁴Ibid., 67.

¹⁵Creach, “Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream,” 36.

¹⁶Ibid., 41, 46.

¹⁷O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 116-117, 136, 140-143. The connection between paradise and water is also well attested in ancient Near Eastern literature. In Mesopotamian texts, the tree and life-giving waters are placed in sanctuaries. E.g., the Epic of Gilgamesh depicts a special cult tree erected on the Apsu, the watery abyss,

and ran through the Garden of Eden. It then split into four headwaters that watered the earth beyond the Garden. Isaiah 8:6-7 points to the rejection of the water of Shiloh, the place where the tabernacle was set up prior to the building of the temple, that would lead to the invasion of a “mighty river,” Assyria. Isa 30:25 and 32:2 associate the term with the waters of paradise. Joel 4:18 paints a poignant portrait of Judah’s glorious future when “a foundation will flow out of the Lord’s house and will water the valley of acacias.”

Why is the sanctuary theme included in Psalm 1? To answer this question, it is necessary to explore the parallels between Ps 1:3 and several other passages in the Psalms that place the motifs of the river and the tree in the context of the sanctuary.

*Parallels between Psalm 1:3 and Other Related
Texts in the Psalter*

Psalms 52:8 and 92:12-14 speak of the righteous as trees planted in the temple of God. Contrary to this image of prosperity and security, the wicked ones are destined to be *uprooted* from the land of the living, i.e., namely, destroyed. In Ps 52:8, the righteous one is “like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God,” while in Ps 92:12-14 the righteous are like trees planted, flourishing, and bearing fruit in the house of the Lord. Both passages use language that is strongly reminiscent of Ps 1:3.

The linguistic parallels between Psalms 1 and 92 may be demonstrated in several key examples. First, the key words in Ps 1:3, used to describe the righteous one as a flourishing tree (Heb. שָׁחַל, “planted, deeply root” and פָּרַה “to bear fruit, be fruitful, flourishing”), are used again in Ps 92:13 to describe the prosperous tree “*planted* (שָׁחַל) in the house of the Lord,” which will “*flourish* (פָּרַה) in the courts of our God” (emphasis supplied). Not only is the destiny of the righteous described with the same terms in Psalms 1 and 92, but also the destiny of the enemies or the wicked ones. The wicked are called רִשְׁעִים (Pss 1:4; 92:8), who are destined “to perish” (אָבַד) (Pss 1:6; 92:9).

Interestingly, Psalms 1 and 92 open with three actions that characterize the righteous, followed by the Hebrew preposition בִּי, which introduces the reasons why the three actions are performed. In Ps 1:1-2, the righteous one “does not *walk* in the counsel of the wicked or *stand* in the way of sinners or *sit* in the way of mockers, *but* (בִּי) his delight is in the law of the Lord” (emphasis supplied). In Ps 92:1-4, the righteous one wants “to *praise* the Lord and *make* music to your name, O Most High, to *proclaim* your love . . . *for* (בִּי) you make me glad by your deed” (emphasis supplied). The linguistic parallels between

in Eridu, the sanctuary of Enki (W. P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 60). Brown, 61-67, points to iconographic parallels among numerous seal impressions, tomb reliefs, and statues, and images of goats and caprids eating the leaves or buds.

Psalms 1 and 92 strongly suggest thematic parallels between them and allow the tree imagery in Psalm 1 to be interpreted as referring to the sanctuary.¹⁸

Finally, the fruitful tree imageries are later found in the Psalter in Pss 128:3 and 144:12, again in the context of blessings coming from Zion. Importantly, the Psalter marks the journey of the righteous, which begins in Psalm 1 and which provides the ideal description of who the righteous should be—"a tree planted by the water" in the sanctuary. In Psalms 52 and 92, the tree has gained full entrance into the precincts of YHWH, flourishing within the temple itself. The righteous, moreover, have aged, reaching full maturity yet still "full of sap," and bearing fruit in the sanctuary (92:14). Near the end of the Psalter (Psalms 128 and 144), botanical imagery has spread its shoots, as it were, to envelop the family and nation of Israel. Thus, it would appear that there is a progression through the sanctuary, moving from its outer perimeters to its innermost reaches.

This point is further strengthened by the use of the Hebrew word אֲשֵׁר ("happy"), which is found in Ps 1:1 ("Blessed" [or happy] is the man") and at the end of Psalm 2 ("Blessed [or happy] are all who take refuge in him"). This word is closely related to the verb אָשַׁר ("to walk straight") and it may point to the way in which a believer seeks happiness, i.e., he must come to Zion (Pss 65:5; 84:5) where refuge is to be found (Pss 2:12; 34:9; 84:12) and where sins are forgiven (Ps 32:1-2).¹⁹

The Hebrew word אֲשֵׁר ("happy") is missing from the first two books of Psalms, with the exception of the last psalm in each group: Ps 41:2 (Book I), Ps 89:16 (Book III), and Ps 106:3 (Book IV), and, finally, Pss 112:1; 119:1-2; 127:5; 128:1; 137:8-9; 144:15; 146:5 (Book V).²⁰ This seems to suggest that the journey toward happiness culminates in the last book of the Psalter, i.e., in praises to God in the sanctuary, which parallels the growth and development of the fruit trees as one moves through the Psalter. The development of the image of the tree in the Psalter sheds new light on the tree image in Psalm 1 and contributes to making a stronger connection between this psalm and the sanctuary, and also points to a possible narrative of deepening happiness that revolves around the sanctuary.

The Sanctuary in Psalm 2

Psalm 2 continues with an image that has strong connections to the sanctuary—Zion, God's holy hill (v. 6). 1 Chronicles 17:12-14 makes a clear connection between the installment of the king and the sanctuary. In Psalm 1, the righteous and the wicked are depicted with similes of tree and chaff, respectively, while the destinies of the righteous and the wicked are synonymously described in

¹⁸Brown, 78.

¹⁹H. Cazelles, "אֲשֵׁר," *TDOT* (1974), 1:446.

²⁰*Ibid.*

both psalms: the righteous are blessed (אַשְׁרֵי, “happy”) (Pss 1:1; 2:12) and the wicked are destroyed (Pss 1:6; 2:9, 12). These entities become personalized and more concrete in the time of conflict between good and evil in Psalm 2. The chaff becomes “the nations and the kings of the earth” (vv. 1-2 and 10). The righteous tree becomes the righteous king (v. 6) and even more intimately “my Son” (vv. 7 and 12). The life-giving river becomes Zion, the Lord’s holy hill (v. 6), that is, the sanctuary, which cannot be removed.

*The Sanctuary in Psalms 1 and 2 and
the Shaping of the Psalter*

The themes of conflict between the wicked and the righteous and of the sanctuary as the firm shelter and place of help that are presented in Psalms 1 and 2 are revisited elsewhere in the Psalms (3:4; 5:5-12; 18:6; 20:2). R. Jacobson asserts that the confession of the Lord’s faithfulness in Psalms 1 and 2 “led Israel to develop a set of expectations about what the Lord’s fidelity would or ought to look like.”²¹ The crisis of faith occurs when the world does not seem to be in harmony with what Psalms 1 and 2 claim. W. Brueggemann explains that because the world of Psalm 1 is not universally true, meaning that obedience is not always rewarded with prosperity, the psalmists faced a crisis with only one solution—“to depart from the safe world of Psalm 1 and plunge into the middle of the Psalter where one will find a world enraged with suffering.”²²

Brueggemann contends that the psalmists’ journey of faith in the Psalter follows a progression from “hesed” (חֶסֶד) doubted to “hesed” trusted,²³ i.e., from questioning God’s loving kindness to trusting it fully. He bases his argument on the conviction that “Psalms 1 and 150 provide special framing for the collection” and “assert the issues that should inform one’s reading and singing of the Psalms.”²⁴ Brueggemann contends that the entire Psalter lives between the confident boundaries of obedience (Psalm 1) and praise (Psalm 150).²⁵

In the general plan of the Psalter, the chief crisis seems to take place at the midpoint of the Psalter, in Psalms 73 and 74. A number of scholars either depict Psalm 73 as a canonical marker of the Psalter or acknowledge its significant position in the Psalter.²⁶ Brueggemann

²¹R. Jacobson, “Burning Our Lamps with Borrowed Oil: The Liturgical Use of the Psalms and the Life of Faith,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. S. B. Reid (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 124.

²²W. Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 197.

²³Ibid., 204.

²⁴Ibid., 193.

²⁵Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise,” 68.

²⁶See, e.g., ibid., 81; J. C. McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 143; Brueggemann and Miller, 45-46; M.

believes that Psalm 73 stands at the center of the Psalter in a crucial role of enacting the transformation necessary to make a move from doubting God's "hesed" to trusting it.²⁷ A number of parallels between Psalms 1, 2, 73, and 74 and the concluding psalms of the Psalter suggest that these psalms and their parallel motifs may have played a significant role in the shaping of the Psalter. This also suggests that Psalm 74, together with Psalm 73, should be regarded as the canonical marker of the Psalter.

The Relationship between Psalms 1 and 2 and Psalms 73 and 74

Psalms 73 and 74 resumes and develops the conclusions of Psalms 1 and 2—that the righteous will certainly find blessing from God and the wicked will certainly perish.²⁸ Furthermore, both Psalms 73 and 74 seem to parallel Psalms 1 and 2 as they deal with the reversal of what is claimed in Psalms 1 and 2. Both Psalms 73 and 74 deal with the prosperity of evil. However, while Psalm 73 approaches this problem as a personal dilemma, as suggested by the use of the first person singular (Ps 73:2, 13, 17, 22), Psalm 74 deals with it as a national dilemma, as supported by the use of the plural to denote those in whose name the psalm has been composed (Ps 74:1, 4, 8).

Psalm 73 seems to wonder at the reversal of what is claimed in Psalm 1. Psalm 1 claims that the righteous prosper (v. 3) and the wicked perish (vv. 4-6). However, in Psalm 73 the psalmist ponders the harsh reality that seems to imply the opposite. The psalmist claims that he saw "the prosperity of the wicked" (v. 3) and the righteous being pure in vain (v. 13).

Psalm 74 discloses a number of linguistic and thematic parallels with Psalm 2. Both psalms begin with the word למה ("why") and inquire about the wicked actions of pagan nations. However, in Psalm 74 the psalmist wonders about the tragic reversal of what is demonstrated in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2, the righteous king is firmly installed on Zion, the Lord's hill that cannot be removed. In Psalm 74, Zion, the sanctuary of God lies in ruins (Ps 74:3-8). In Psalms 2, Zion is the symbol of stability and strength of the king. In Psalm 74, Zion lies in ruins as the symbol of the utter defeat of Israel.

The predominant designation of the wicked in Psalms 1 and 73 is רשעים ("wicked") (Pss 1:1, 4-6; 73:3, 12). The predominant designations of the wicked in Psalms 2 and 74 are "enemies," "nations," "rulers," and "kings," terms that can be understood synonymously to depict nations at war against Israel and her king (Pss 2:1-2, 8, 10; 74:3, 10, 18, 22). The clamor of enemies in Psalm 74 seems

R. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 238.

²⁷Brueggemann and Miller, 45.

²⁸Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise," 87; McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 143.

to echo the uproar of the nations in Psalm 2. While Psalms 1 and 73 deal with the question of prosperity, Psalms 2 and 74 deal with the nations conspiring (Psalm 2) and, finally, raging war against the king of Israel (Psalm 74). The parallels between Psalms 2 and 74 are highlighted by the common reference to the king of Israel. In both Psalms 2 and 74, the interests and prosperity of Israel are embodied in the king, who dwells on Zion (Pss 2:6; 74:12).

Another parallel points to the reversal of fate in Psalms 2 and 74. Psalm 2 shows how the Lord laughs, scoffs, and rebukes the rebellious nations (vv. 4-5). In Psalm 74, the enemies mock and revile the Lord's name (vv. 10-11, 22). In Psalm 2, the Lord rises up and speaks (vv. 6-9). In Psalm 74, the Lord is mute and Israel calls to her God to rise and act (vv. 1, 10-11, 19-22). The parallels between Psalms 2 and 74 require further analysis, but the analysis offered here seems to suffice for the intention of relating the two psalms together.

The Sanctuary Experience in Psalms 73 and 74

In both Psalms 73 and 74, the sanctuary emerges as the place where conflict and resolution reach their peak (Pss 73:17; 74:3-8). While some take v. 17 to be the turning point in Psalm 73,²⁹ others rightly see v. 15 as the pivotal point of the psalm.³⁰ In v. 15, the psalmist realizes that if he keeps on pointing to seeming inconsistencies of God's justice, he would be unfaithful to his people and might cause them to go astray. It is remarkable that it is the psalmist's sense of belonging to his community of faith that led him closer to God and to the sanctuary, where his genuine spiritual transformation took place (v. 17). What kind of experience in the sanctuary marked the transformation of the psalmist in these psalms?

The New Jerusalem Bible takes *מקדשי אל* in v. 17 (lit. "the sanctuaries of God") to refer to the ruined pagan sanctuaries (because of the plural in the Hebrew) and not to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Thus, when the psalmist entered the ruined pagan sanctuaries, he perceived them as a tangible proof of God's judgment over the wicked. Similarly, H. Birkeland interprets the phrase to refer to the ruined illegitimate sanctuaries in Israel.³¹

These interpretations do not seem adequate for at least two reasons. First, the holy places in v. 17 are not described as ruined. Verses 18 and 19 speak of God ruining the wicked, rather than their temples. Second, v. 17 pictures the psalmist entering the holy place and receiving a revelation there. In the sanctuary, the psalmist gains a new sense of God's presence: "Yet I am always with you" (v. 23); "But as for me, it is good to be near God"

²⁹E.g., L. C. Allen, "Psalm 73: Pilgrimage from Doubt to Faith," *BBR* 7 (1997): 6.

³⁰E.g., McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 141; J. L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 117.

³¹Quoted by J. N. Clayton, "An Examination of Holy Space in Psalm 73: Is Wisdom's Path Infused with an Eschatologically Oriented Hope?" *TJ* 27 (2006): 128.

(v. 28). It seems unlikely that the sight of destroyed pagan or illegitimate Hebrew sanctuaries could have provoked such strong feelings of closeness to God which are found in the latter part of psalm. This experience is more aptly related to God's sanctuary than to ruined pagan temples.

The use of the plural to refer to the sanctuary of God may function to intensify the holiness of the place, or it could reflect a common Canaanite practice of designating holy places with plural forms. The plural *מִקְדָּשֵׁי אֱלֹהִים* in Ps 73:17 mostly likely refers to the multiple holy precincts within the sanctuary, as in Lev 21:23, Ps 68:36, and Jer 51:51.³²

The psalm ends with the psalmist's resolution to "tell of all your deeds" (v. 28), which could fit a religious festival taking place in the sanctuary (Pss 26:7; 91:2; 105:2; 107:22; 145:4, 6, 11). It seems reasonable to assert that the psalmist experiences his remarkable transformation probably through sharing in one of the Hebrew religious festivals, such as the Passover or the New Year festival.³³ The psalmist could have experienced "a priestly oracle of salvation, some sort of festal presentation, a Levitical sermon, or some kind of mystical experience."³⁴ R. G. Bratcher and W. D. Reyburn argue that "the language suggests a special revelation from God, either in a vision or through the inspired word of a priest" and that "perhaps some ritual was involved."³⁵

Mays remarks that on entering the sanctuary, the psalmist entered the sphere of the powerful presence of God and "the certainty he was given was not merely belief in the doctrine that the wicked perish; it was more certainty of God as his God."³⁶ Worship in the temple during the festivals revived memories of God's great acts in the past. However, L. C. Allen rightly observes that in Psalm 73 "there is a 'personal' application of Yahweh's ancient threat and execution of judgment to the contemporary situation of moral and religious chaos."³⁷

Certainty of the exact nature of the experience in the sanctuary does not seem to be possible. However, one thing is certain in Psalm 73. As J. L. Crenshaw describes it, "the fresh insight has something to do with a place . . . a relationship that blossoms in that holy environment. . . . Regardless of the actual manner by which inner renewal came about, a change is apparent. The burden is lifted, and

³²M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 229; R. G. Bratcher and W. D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 640.

³³R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 234.

³⁴Clayton, 124. It was customary for the afflicted to receive a response in God's name from the temple personnel (e.g., 1 Samuel 2).

³⁵Bratcher and Reyburn, 640.

³⁶Mays, *Psalms*, 243.

³⁷Allen, 7.

the psalmist proceeds to tell others what is now certain.”³⁸ The presence of God brought the certainty of faith where the uncertainty of understanding existed in the past. The transformation of the psalmist has to do with the “effect of God’s presence, as God lifts the pious out of despair over evil.”³⁹ The possibility of experiencing the presence of God was the ministry and mystery of the sanctuary as demonstrated in other psalms (Pss 26:8; 27:4; 43:3; 65:4; 89).⁴⁰

Psalm 74 seems to mark a significant shift in the Psalter since it pictures the sanctuary in Jerusalem lying in ruins. Brueggemann rightly asserts that Psalm 74 “does not concern simply a historical invasion and the loss of a building,” but “it speaks about the violation of the sacral key to all reality, the glue that holds the world together.”⁴¹

*The Significance of the Enthronement Psalms
and the Psalms of Ascent*

The further development of the sanctuary narrative in the Psalter is presented here only in broad strokes because of space limitations. Psalms 73 and 74 open Book III of the Psalter, which engages in the challenge of acknowledging and embracing the negativity that causes disorientation.⁴² Book III depicts how “the disoriented psalmists desperately look to reorient their theology by appealing to Temple, land, and Davidic covenant.”⁴³ The psalmists turn to the temple with the acknowledgment that God’s temple is a lovely place, a place of security and blessings (Psalm 84). The psalmists also turn to the land that prospers under God’s blessing (Ps 85:12) and they tie their hopes to Zion, the city of God (Psalm 87). They turn to the Davidic king for help (Psalms 89).

R. E. Wallace observes that it becomes clear that these traditional elements are no longer capable of providing hope when Psalms 84–89 are interpreted in the light of their canonical context, i.e., of their present placement in the Psalter.⁴⁴ Psalms 84–89 come after Psalm 74, which depicts the ruined sanctuary and the destroyed land. The reader of the Psalter encounters Psalms 84–89 in the context of the sanctuary having been destroyed. J. C. McCann rightly observes that a new perspective is achieved “when Books I

³⁸Crenshaw, 123.

³⁹Clayton, 132.

⁴⁰Mays, *Psalms*, 243.

⁴¹W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 68.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 52.

⁴³R. E. Wallace, “The Narrative Effect of Psalms 84–89,” *Journal of Hebrew Scripture* 11 (2010): 3.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 2, 7.

and II are read in conjunction with Book III and its concluding Psalm 89.⁴⁵ Wallace contends that “with an exilic setting providing a hermeneutic lens through which to read the psalm, Ps 84 becomes an ironic expression of hopelessness and longing.”⁴⁶ This conclusion about the nature of Psalm 84 can probably be applied to Book III as a whole. The book opens with a scene of injustice (Psalms 73) and the destruction of the temple and the land (Psalm 74), and closes with the failure of the Davidic covenant (Psalm 89).

If the Psalter ended with Book III, no hope would be left for Israel. However, the reorientation of faith begins with Book IV and continues with Book V. It seems remarkable that Books IV and V appear to provide answers to the major concerns that caused disorientation in Book III. The predominant scenes in the opening psalms of Book IV are scenes of the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King. Psalms 90–93 deal with the problem of the destroyed sanctuary and point believers toward a better, heavenly sanctuary (Pss 93:2, 5; 96:6, 9; 99:1, 5, 9). Psalms 93 and 95–99 focus on a better and divine King. Psalm 94 deals with the land and reassures believers that the Lord “will never forsake his inheritance” (v. 14); he will build up Jerusalem (Ps 147:2).

McCann finds Psalms 93, 95–99 to be the theological heart of the Psalter.⁴⁷ He recognizes the theological relationship between these so-called enthronement psalms and Psalms 1 and 2. He argues that the Hebrew roots שפט (“to judge”) and צדק (“to be just, righteous”), which constitute a concise summary of God’s will in Psalms 1 and 2, are found in Psalms 93, 95–99 expressing God’s will for God’s world (e.g., the root שפט in Pss 96:13 [2x]; 97:2; 98:9; 99:4 [2x], and צדק in 96:13; 97:2, 6, 11, 12; 98:2, 9; 99:4). These two roots describe “the effects of God’s reign, the most prominent of which is the establishment of justice or the act of setting of things right on earth.”⁴⁸ In the rest of the Psalter, McCann finds examples of the implementation of God’s justice (שפט) and righteousness (צדק), which results in peace and happiness for the needy, the poor, and all nations (e.g., Psalms 72). When these are not being implemented, the psalmist finds refuge in God and expresses his hurt and hope in prayer.⁴⁹

By bringing attention to the importance of the two concepts of justice and righteousness for the structure of the Psalter, McCann appears to provide new ways of showing the importance of the sanctuary in the Psalter as the Hebrew roots שפט and צדק are among the key terms for sanctuary theology. In Lev 19:15 and Deut 1:16; 4:8; 16:18, for example, both roots appear

⁴⁵McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 43.

⁴⁶Wallace, 7.

⁴⁷McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 41–50; idem, “Psalms,” 159–165.

⁴⁸McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 45.

⁴⁹McCann, “Psalms,” 160–162.

together. The sanctuary was designated as the place of divine judgment, as indicated by the judgment of the Urim (Num 27:21) and by the breastplate of judgment of the high priest (Exod 28:15, 29, 30). The cultic decrees are called “righteous judgments” (Deut 4:8). Accordingly, many psalms depict God as the one who sits enthroned, ready to judge the world, and relates this imagery closely to the sanctuary (Pss 9:4, 7-8, 19; 50:2, 6, 8, 23; 96:6, 10, 13).

The purpose of the cultic acts was to restore the worshiper’s righteousness as indicated by the name “sacrifices of righteousness” (Deut 33:19; cf. Ps 4:5). Not surprisingly, therefore, McCann finds two key concepts of God’s justice (צֶדֶק) and righteousness (צְדָקָה) in Psalms 93, 95–99, which portray God ruling in or from his sanctuary (Pss 93:5; 96:6, 9; 99:7, 9).

Mays argues that the enthronement psalms might have been used in some temple festival to celebrate the enthronement of the Lord, but in the final form of the Psalter they function differently, i.e., eschatologically. “They no longer refer only to what happened in the cult, but as well as to what was promised in the prophecy,”⁵⁰ i.e., God’s reign over all nations and peoples (Isa 42:1; 45:22-23; 49:1-6; 52:10; 55:4-5; Ps 96:7, 10, 13).

As the new reign of God envisioned by eschatological passages involves the reign that goes beyond the present state of Israel, the new sanctuary of God goes beyond the present Jerusalem temple, i.e., it involves all nations and all creation (Pss 96–100; 148; 150; Isa 56:6-9). The whole city of Jerusalem becomes God’s temple (Isa 54:11-13; 2 Chron 3:6; Exod 39:10-13).

The psalms of ascent (Psalms 120–134) seem to further reinforce the sanctuary motif by inviting the worshipers to ascend to Zion (i.e., the sanctuary) and receive the blessing from the Lord, who reigns in Zion (e.g., Ps 128:5). As the Psalter reaches the Songs of Ascent, it seems that the theme of Zion and of the sanctuary is ever present from that point to the end of the Psalter. Zion is mentioned in a great number of psalms that follow the Ascent Psalms (e.g., Pss 135:21; 137:1, 3; 138:2; 146:10; 147:12; 149:2; 150:1). The Psalter seems to lead the worshiper finally to Zion and the time when God will reign from Zion forever (e.g., Ps 148:10).

The Sanctuary in the Concluding Psalms of the Psalter

The concluding psalms of the Psalter seem to revisit the major concerns expressed by Psalms 1, 2, 73, and 74 that have been discussed before. An attempt is made here to briefly point to certain linguistic and thematic parallels between Psalms 1, 2, 73, 74, and the concluding psalms of the Psalter.

The righteous in Psalms 1 and the final psalms of the Psalter engage in similar activities. The righteous in Ps 1:2 delight in the law of the Lord. The righteous in Ps 149:2 rejoice in the Lord. Since the righteous in Ps 1:2 delight in the law of the Lord, the Lord delights in his people in Ps 149:4. The righteous

⁵⁰Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” 10.

in Ps 1:2 meditate on the law of God. The righteous in Ps 145:5 meditate on God's wonderful works. The law of God is a prominent part of the identity of the righteous in both Psalm 1 and the final psalms (1:2; 147:19-20).

The psalmist in Ps 73:28 acknowledges that "it is good to be near (קרב) to all who call on him." Psalm 148:14 depicts Israel as "close (קרב) to his [God's] heart."

Both Psalms 1 and the final psalms of the Psalter tell of the final destruction of the wicked at the Lord's judgment (Pss 1:4-6; 145:20; 146:9; 149:7-9). The Lord's judgment is described in similar terms in Psalm 1 and the concluding psalms of the Psalter. In Ps 1:6, "the Lord watches over (יִדַּעַת) the way of the righteous, but the way (דֶּרֶךְ) of the wicked (רָשָׁעִים) will perish." In Ps 145:20, "the Lord watches (שָׁמַר) all who love him, but all the wicked (רָשָׁעִים) he will destroy." In Ps 146:9: "the Lord watches over (שָׁמַר) the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways (דֶּרֶךְ) of the wicked (רָשָׁעִים)."

In Ps 2:6, Zion stands as the unshakable guarantee of the prosperity of Israel. In Ps 74:3-4, Zion lies in ruins as the symbol of the utter destruction of Israel by her enemies. However, Ps 147:2 expresses new hope in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the temple, and reaffirms the promises of Ps 2:6. The glorious prospects of the king ruling over his enemies from Zion in Ps 2:6 are severely questioned by the rule of enemies in Ps 74:4-8; 18-23. However, Ps 146:10 reaffirms that "the Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations." Psalm 149:2 gives hope that the people of Zion will be glad in their king. The Lord is subject to shame in Ps 74:18-23, but he is exalted forever in Psalms 146-150. In Ps 2:6-7, the Lord's son (בן) is honored as the king on Zion. In Ps 149:2, 4, the Lord honors (פָּאֵר, meaning "to honor," "to crown," "to glorify") the people (בן) of Zion.

The introductory psalms (Psalms 1 and 2), the psalms found in the middle of the Psalter (Psalms 73 and 74), and the final psalms of the Psalter (Psalms 145-150) may be brought together by their common concerns for the law of God (Pss 2:6; 74:2; 149:2) and the people of God (Pss 2:7; 74:19; 149:2). The concluding psalms of the Psalter restore faith in the proclamation of Psalms 1 and 2 and celebrate the victory of the Lord. They invite the worshipers to join the heavens and everything that exists in praising God in his sanctuary (e.g., Pss 148:1-14; 150:1-6). What bridges the secure world of Books I and II and the renewed praise in Books IV and V after faith was severely challenged in Book III is the scene of the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King who rules in it (Pss 91-101).

The Psalter closes with the eschatological hope of a rebuilt Jerusalem (Ps 147:2) and the people triumphantly praising God in his sanctuary (Ps 150:1), an act which is characteristic of the prophets (Isa 52:7-10; 54:11-14). The descriptions of the people of Zion rejoicing in their king in Ps 149:2 and the call for the universal praise in Psalms 146-150 strongly resemble similar descriptions of rejoicing and praises in the prophets (Isa 24:14; 30:29; 51:11; 52:7-9; 65:18).

Conclusion

The possible parallels between the discussed psalms certainly deserve further study. However, the development of the sanctuary theme in the discussed pivotal psalms appears to suggest that the sanctuary motif played a significant role in the shaping of the Psalter and hints of a possible narrative movement from abiding in the sanctuary as an ideal in Psalm 1 to the eschatological abiding and praising God in his sanctuary in Psalms 149 and 150. Brueggemann describes the psalmists' journey of faith by using the "scheme" of orientation—disorientation—new orientation. The journey of faith begins with a season of orientation characterized by pure yet unchallenged faith in Psalms 1 and 2. The journey then takes the psalmists through a season of disorientation when faith is challenged by evil and suffering and, finally, brings them to new orientation when transformed and mature faith emerges after trials.⁵¹ At every stage, the sanctuary appears to be the place where victory is accomplished.

The Psalms seem to demonstrate that "the reorientation has both continuities with and discontinuities from what has been."⁵² Thus, Israel still hopes that the Lord will build up Jerusalem (Ps 147:2, 12-14), but the transformed faith now looks beyond the earthly Jerusalem to the splendor of the Lord above the earth and the heavens (Ps 148:13). The shape of the Psalter seems to promote Israel's faith in the heavenly sanctuary and the divine King.

This emphasis appears to be fully developed in the NT, which closes with scenes of God welcoming the righteous ones into his sanctuary (Rev 22:1-2), undoubtedly reminiscent of Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17, and Ezekiel 47. The praise of the righteous ones in Rev 21:3 seems to echo the praise of the righteous ones praising God in his sanctuary in the closing psalms of the Psalter.

⁵¹This "scheme" is used to describe decisive moves of faith in the Psalms and not as an adequate description of the overall structure of the Psalter (Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 9-10).

⁵²W. Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," JSOT 17 (1980): 6.